SPONSA REGIS

A SPIRITUAL REVIEW FOR SISTERS

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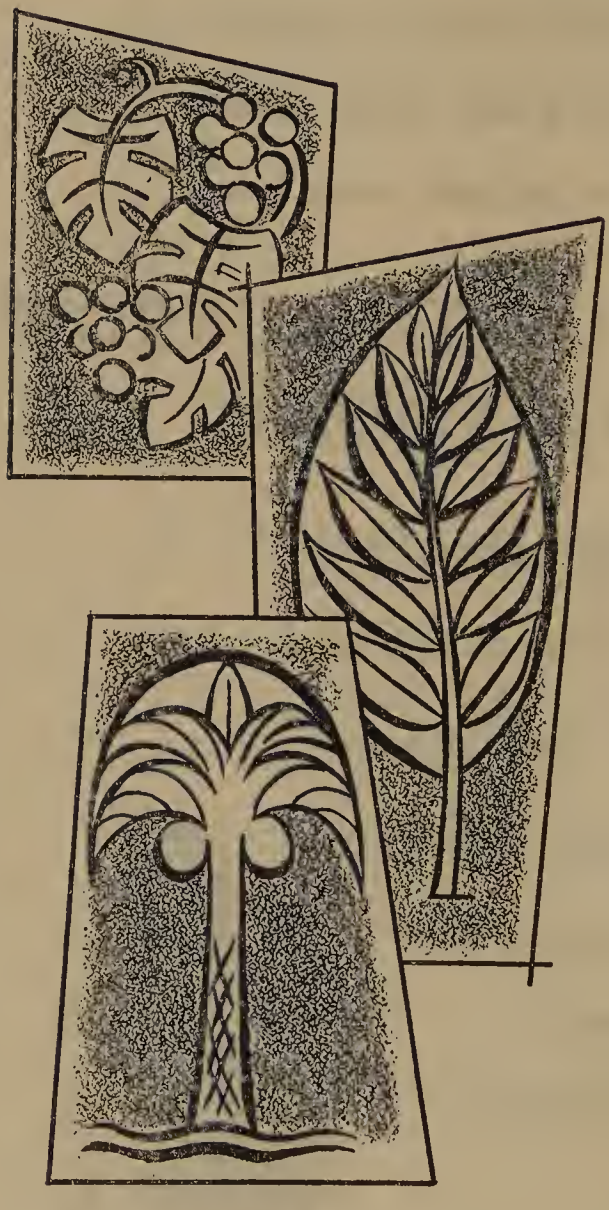

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The Coming of the Fire

Archbishop Thomas D. Roberts, S.J.
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One of the reasons for the return to the primitive practice of celebrating the Easter vigil on the night of Holy Saturday is to recover the dramatic force of light as symbol of the risen Savior. Fire is found in nearly all religions, even the most primitive, as the most perfect symbol of the Divinity. One of the most ancient and profound, dating from Zoroaster in Persia, still has its fire-temples where Parsees, in Bombay and elsewhere, tend the flame never extinguished. The Holy Spirit Himself chose fire to denote outwardly both His nature and His operations.

With a mission to each of us individually, and to all our race collectively, not less real than the Father's or the Son's, the Holy Spirit is, by comparison, less easily understood.

A father we all know. Multiply, to find God, all the perfections of Father-and-Mother of which He is the Source; subtract all imperfections, and we are on the way to realizing our Lord's purpose in bidding us call on God as Father.

So of the Son who appears as Mary's baby, grows in mind and body till his favorite, John, can speak of the Word "which we have touched, felt and handled."

But a ghost? Even a holy ghost. Hard to conceive, all too easy to fear. So He will find His symbol in fire as worshipped by millions.

But familiarity with such a benefit as fire blunts the edge of our appreciation. So He will send His fire at the end of the coldest, bitterest days ever suffered by Christian souls. A look at the gospel accounts will tell us how cold and

desolate the days of the Passion were. Saint Peter and Saint Thomas are helpful here.

As mentions of Saint Peter in the New Testament are high in three figures, it is enough to note about him 1) that his very prominence is proof of his Master's thought for him, 2) that the clashes between Apostles mentioned so often even at the Last Supper point to such personal jealousies as boiled up in the request of Mrs. Zebedee and sons to displace Peter, 3) that Peter did not ease the situation by his reply to the Master's prophecy of His Passion and of His followers' defection. In effect, Peter's thought is fairly paraphrased: "They are a poor lot; but you always have *me* to count on." As it turned out, the only man of his followers (all the women were faithful) who did not run away was Peter's rival, John. And the gallant Pope swore by God, at no challenge much worse than serving maids, that he was not a follower of the Galilean, did not even know Him.

Then, as to the "Kingdom" of which Peter's sword, miraculously powered, was to be one instrument, how had that fared? The witnesses mentioned in the gospel make the same comment in different words, suggested possibly by the inscription in three languages over the head of Jesus: "King of the Jews." *Divine* king He claimed to be, so His punishment as a Jew is for blasphemy. Roman leave for the execution could not be refused to the Jewish priests' repudiation of any king but Caesar. Say the people gathered for the feast from all the Jewish world: "You claim to be the Son of God; come down from that cross and we will believe you."

The priests whose plot had put Him on the cross were infinitely relieved by His helplessness. How could they not have hesitated to arrest Him, with such evidence of His power over death, over disease, over nature as they could not deny? But that was where Judas had been so useful; so much more intelligent than the other followers; quick to see that three predictions of death by the Nazarene pointed to His loss of confidence. What kingdom could be built on a God who could not even resist crucifixion? So the taunt is: "Prove yourself the Son of God." And to the crowds: "See, He does not

come down. He *can't*. Now we know what to make of his claims to divinity."

So, naturally, the Roman soldiers did not believe in His divinity.

So, Matthew tells us, not one only of the two thieves crucified with Him, but both at first did not believe. What more natural than that the only two on Calvary who shared with Jesus the agony of crucifixion, who had heard of His power and of His compassion should first beseech Him to rescue all three together; then join in execrating one who had falsely raised their hopes?

If there was one collection of beings more shaken still, it was the followers of Jesus as the Messias, accepted in the traditional sense of anointed Conqueror, now seemingly helpless to face the challenge: "Come down from the cross and we will believe you." No wonder that the refrain of the four gospels after the death of Jesus, reports of a resurrection not withstanding, is "neither did they believe." The story of the Magdalene they called "madness."

Such were the ten apostles gathered at a meal in the upper room, their doors locked for fear of Jewish authority already alerted about the empty tomb, ready to fasten on the disciples the guilt of removing the body as false evidence of resurrection.

As suddenly as the flash of an explosion, their fear and depression were turned into fear of another kind, but mingled now with joy. Jesus had not come in: He just *was* there among them. But the women could not be right! It must be His ghost. If so, He is still a thought-reader, for He challenges them to touch such flesh and bones as ghosts have not. And, for further proof, He asks to share their meal and before them He eats of their fish and honeycomb.

Better proof, if possible, even than that; only the Jesus they had known could speak of death as an incident that only altered without ending their joint mission. Now they were to take over the visible part of His task, by witnessing to His resurrection; to be God's Broadcasting Corporation to carry across all space and time a message so much guaranteed His that

to hear them would be to hear Him; to despise them, to reject Him. His power to forgive sins, that should be theirs, too.

Thomas was not there that day. Not long before, he had asked Jesus how they could follow Him, seeing they knew not His way nor whither He was bound. And the most cheerful end he could see to the Jerusalem expedition was that they could die there with Him. No more than with the others had His earlier talk of final victory registered. Still less disposed was Thomas by his pessimistic temperament to give credence to the reports of the women about a risen Christ, and he may have felt too sad to bear company. But, his companions must have thought, all that will change when Thomas hears *our* news.

Nothing of the kind. He knew how the Master had died. The taunts of the crowd had echoed in his heart, not with their contempt but with our human inability to see suffering as tool of redemption.

So the answer of Thomas was: "Now you, too, believe Him risen; let me also judge for myself, seeing, hearing, touching." And in that refusal he persisted for a whole week, rejecting the evidence even of John, presumably of Mary, too, now in John's care. He could not have added much to harmony or gaiety among the other apostles now, by definition, witnesses to the resurrection as the foundation of the whole Christian structure.

When, eight days after, Jesus appeared again in the same place to the same people, the only difference was the presence of Thomas. But Jesus made it plain that it was for Thomas that He had come. No need to take up the challenge to see, hear and touch. Only Jesus, so uncompromising in his demands on our reasonable faith, could have abstained from any word of rebuke for an unreasonable refusal. Here, as so often, God uses human weakness as the *felix culpa,* the happy sin which has brought us the crowning evidence of doubting Thomas: "My Lord and my God."

This story we have now worked out ourselves, digging deep for the treasures of truth as all precious things must be dug out. Now we see all eleven apostles qualified as witnesses of the resurrection. But they are specifically forbidden to start their ministry in our Lord's parting words before His

ascension: they must await in prayer the "Promise of the Father." He it is who will make plain all that Jesus had said, give to their witness the force of Spirit who renews the face of the world.

Note the last words of the apostles to Jesus about to return bodily to His Father: "What about restoring the kingdom we have been about?" Three years of watching the Redeemer at work, hearing His words, seeing His miracles, not even the sight of Him in the posture of a slave washing their feet — not even that divine plan had eradicated the Jewish concept of a triumphant Messias whose glory they were to share most. So they are warned not to leave Jerusalem, not to attempt any ministry until their "baptism" by the Holy Spirit should transform them.

Nine days later, this baptism is given to an assembly in the upper room including all the apostles, many other brethren, all "persevering with one mind in prayer with the women and Mary, the mother of Jesus." Only signs of the Spirit were seen. First the sound of a great wind, telling of might, of power; then, seen over the head of each "parted tongues" as it were of fire, like the candles on our altars telling the same story.

Saint Luke mentions natives of seventeen countries who heard the message of the Spirit from those Galileans, each in his own language. But Saint Peter thought less of the words given to him than of the mind of the Spirit possessing him: Spirit symbolized by fire that is Love itself, Source of all light, Source of all energy.

No miracle so great as the contrast between the attractive but earthy Peter of the gospels, and the post-Pentecostal Peter, wielding the supreme authority as highest pattern of Christian humility, of apostolic selflessness.

So also the action of the Spirit in Thomas, one of the few apostles linked by long tradition to a particular country: India. It glories in "Saint Thomas Christians" to this day, venerating his Master's tomb at Mylapur.

Confirmation is the Cinderella of the sacraments; its theology is difficult, its relation to the other sacraments obscure, its discipline varying widely with time and place. In the Western Church — but not the whole of it — the bishop

alone confirms, sometimes rarely, so that great numbers miss confirmation altogether. The remembrance of His coming is apt to be of unusual hats put on and off, of some frightening questions by the great man in a tense atmosphere. An adult convert may wonder why the bishop does not even translate the Latin words, so that the Holy Spirit is not only not heard by all in their own living languages, but is heard only in a language which today is nobody's.

All of which can only mean that the Spirit of wisdom, truth and love was never more needed. He is not limited to that sacrament for the lighting of His flame, nor indeed to any sacrament at all, but it is certain that the flame He lit in Peter and, much to Peter's surprise, in many pagans not yet baptized, is a fire more precious to our souls than is the sun to our bodies. It is a fire called Love. It can flicker low and die if not fed regularly. Its fuel is any act of love: talking to God, for example, if only to tell Him we find Him hard to talk to, harder to trust when He hurts; any loving thought or act to anyone whose need is our God-planned opportunity.

If the theology of confirmation is hard to grasp, its practice is not; for the Holy Spirit is Paraclete or Comforter. He was all that daily to Thomas whose pessimism was not miraculously cured. He was all that to Peter, guided by Him daily in his care for the whole flock; when calumniated, scourged, imprisoned. Hating and fearing the cross more than most, Peter came through the Spirit to die upon it, happy and triumphant, rooted this time in the certainty of resurrection.

All that truth is in the sublime poetry of the *Veni Sancti Spiritus* said daily at Mass during the week of Pentecost. In the *Veni Creator* too. It is summed up in the invocation that should be every Christian's daily prayer, especially where light or strength or love seem to fail:

Come, Holy Spirit,
Fill the hearts of your faithful
And kindle in them
The fire of your love.

The Nun Meditates on the Eucharist

David Michael Stanley, S.J.
Toronto, Canada

THERE ARE four words in the liturgical account of the Last Supper given in the Roman Mass which summarize the action of Christ in instituting the Holy Eucharist "on the night before he suffered." *Accepit, benedixit, fregit, dedit*: He took, He blessed, He broke, and He gave. These same four words represent the divine activity of the Master in the life of the Christian, the life of the religious, in my life.

Accepit: *He took.* At the Last Supper, Jesus took bread, took wine, the most common, inexpensive items of diet in the world of His time. Every man, were he rich or poor, had bread and wine upon his table. They were, you might say, "the meat and potatoes" of the ancient Mediterranean world in which Jesus lived. Ordinary things – essential things.

Moreover, of all the loaves of bread which lay to hand upon the table in the upper room, Jesus chose one particular loaf for the immense privilege of being transubstantiated into His body and blood, soul and divinity, into Himself. Of the many cups of wine standing in the flagons at that Paschal feast, He chose one special cup of wine. The mystery of that divine choice.

Likewise, in my life, He took me. He has chosen me as His companion, His special friend, to be a Christian, a Catholic, a nun. I was (God knows, I may still be) so ordinary, so unremarkable. How many other women have I known who seemed to be so much better than I, who am so weak, so sinful, so perverse at times? There is really so little to recommend me, even to myself – let alone to the Lord Jesus. The mysterious depths of this divine choice of myself.

Yet, at the same time, what grounds for hope, for Christian optimism; what grounds for faith in the divine wisdom of my Master. "You have not chosen me. I have chosen you," Jesus assures me. Sometimes perhaps, in moments of disillusionment, of frustration, I am tempted to think that if Jesus were capable of making a mistake, He certainly made it when He chose me as a Christian, as a nun, as His friend. It is at moments like these (as if to answer such a rash judgment of myself) that those words of Him who is wisdom itself, wisdom incarnate, remind me of the divine origin of my vocation. They put me in my place, so to speak. For I have not chosen myself. I have not even chosen Him. He has chosen me. And all He asks in return is my response of faith, of trust and confidence, of hope and love. If only I can somehow succeed, with His grace, in believing in the wisdom of Jesus' divine choice of myself.

Benedixit: He blessed. Consider the dynamic power of Christ's blessing at the Last Supper: the creative force of His divine benediction, changing bread and wine into Himself. In the strength of that blessing, the bread and wine held in Jesus' sacred hands became his body, blood, soul, divinity. What had, only a moment before, been a mere thing, a common, everyday sort of thing, became the incarnate Son, the Savior of the world.

In my own life, it is this infinitely powerful blessing of the God-Man which constitutes the fundamental reply to my doubts, my fears, my scruples, about the wisdom of His choice of me as a nun. For He has not merely taken me. He has not left me as He found me. He has blessed me. His *accepit* has been accompanied by a transforming *benedixit*. Jesus has blessed me, as He blessed the bread and wine; He has blessed me with all the creative power which He exercises in His sacraments. What a power those many blessings of Jesus in my life.

In baptism: taking what was ordinary human clay, stained with the universal sin of all the children of Adam, and transforming it, really and completely, into a "new creation," making me a child of God, co-heir with Jesus in His Father's house.

In the sacrament of penance: turning God's enemy into His friend, transmuting my half-hearted self-interest into

truly Christian love of Jesus and His Body, the Church, – and how many times.

In the Eucharist: drawing me ever closer to His Sacred Heart, uniting me more effectively to the other members of the Body of Christ, the whole Christ, increasing in me, with divine prodigality, that love which is the essence of Christianity, the focus of the supernatural life of grace.

I consider the power of that divine blessing of my Lord which, in the sacrament of Holy Orders, creates a priest out of an ordinary, sinful man: giving him power which Jesus Christ himself exercised at the Last Supper, bestowing upon his lips the creative force that can change bread and wine into the Eucharist, giving to his hands the healing dynamism that can wash away sin, imparting that creative strength to anoint the sick and so prepare them for their last journey home to God.

I think of the divine blessing and its power which Jesus pours out upon the nun. The Roman Pontifical contains a whole series of blessings conferred upon virgins who are being consecrated to Christ: the blessing for their habit, their veil, their ring, their crown, and – several times over – their persons. All of these blessings are so many tokens of the creative force of Jesus' divine love. "By loving us," says St. Augustine, "God makes us lovable." It is just the other way around with creatures. God is so infinitely unlike myself, who cannot love anything, unless it first be somehow lovable in itself.

Fregit: *He broke.* At the Last Supper, after consecrating the bread with His creative, sacramental blessing, Jesus broke it, so that it might go round the table of His apostles, that it might suffice for all of them: in order, in other words, to make it adaptable to their needs. This is the Bread "given for the life of the world," the Bread which must serve for all, nourishing all to life everlasting.

Likewise, in my nun's life, Christ's whole effort is spent in making me adaptable, in fashioning out of me a perfect instrument, useful for the salvation of mankind. But one serious and fundamental obstacle stands in the way of my usefulness in Christ's divine plan. There is in me one common source of opposition to the purpose Jesus has in mind, making me un-

adaptable, unsuitable, unexpendable for the end to which He chose me and blessed me: my own selfish self.

If I am to become capable of effective collaboration with Jesus, that self must die. Otherwise, I remain useless; my life will be thrown away. Worse still: I shall remain alone, isolated in the loneliness of self-seeking. "Unless the grain of wheat... die, it remains alone, all by itself." "He who loves himself more than me is not worthy of me. He who would save his life, his selfish self, will lose even that egotistical self," Jesus assures me. I have no choice, then, but to allow him to do as he wills: for my own sake, my own salvation, and that of men.

To help me overcome that self and its selfishness, Jesus treats me as he did the bread at the Last Supper. He desires to make me adaptable: by sending suffering, disappointments, humiliations, and trials which are calculated to kill my possessive love of myself. Even the pagans, the classical poets of Greece and Rome, realized that to be completely human, a man must inevitably suffer.

Indeed, that is one of the principal reasons for the awful torments of Jesus' own Passion. He willed to become as perfectly human as was possible for one for whom sin was impossible. "Son of God though he was," the author of the letter to the Hebrews tells us, "he learned obedience in the school of suffering. And being thus made perfect, he has become, for all who hearken to him, the cause of eternal salvation" (Heb. 5:9). The expression of the inspired writer is indeed a bold one. How could Jesus Christ, who from the moment of his incarnation was perfectly obedient to the Father's divine will, learn obedience? How could He, in whom all perfection finds its ultimate meaning, be "made perfect?" The answer of revelation is clear: by suffering during his mortal life, Jesus acquired an experiential knowledge of the difficulties which human nature finds in obedience.

As the ancient proverb runs: misfortune makes for wisdom. Thus in his Passion, Jesus acquired a psychological experience which enriched His human nature. He obtained a practical knowledge, an appreciation, of suffering, which was indispensable for Him in His role as compassionate High Priest.

And so He attained, through suffering, the perfection of human nature: not only because the Passion was the royal road to His exaltation, the glorification of His sacred humanity; but also because that suffering perfected His very humanness. Jesus' earthly career is living proof of that inescapable fact that suffering is an essential part of our human lot upon earth. Man is not completely human until he has suffered.

But there is one lesson of paramount importance that Jesus' actions at the Last Supper teach me about these afflictions which he plans to send me for my perfection. He did not break the bread until after He had blessed it. Only through the power of that divine blessings did the bread become Himself, and so ready to be made adaptable for His purpose.

And here I begin to appreciate two essential Christian truths. Firstly, in my own life, Jesus will not try me, will not send humiliations and disappointments, without first disposing me by His grace, by the blessing of His sacraments, particularly the Eucharist. Secondly, He teaches me also the positive values there are in suffering in the divine plan He has for me. I may indeed pray to be relieved of these sorrows, as He prayed in His struggle in the garden. But primarily my prayer in time of trial must contain that positive searching for His divine will which He also exemplified in the garden: "Father, may your will be carried out."

Dedit: *He gave.* At the Last Supper, Jesus gave the consecrated bread and wine, His body and blood, to the disciples (and to me) "for the salvation of the world." "Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them unto the end — unto perfection." "Your fathers ate manna in the desert. But they are dead. The bread which comes down from heaven is such that he who eats of it never dies. I myself am the living bread that has come down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And now, what is this bread which I am to give? It is my flesh, given for the life of the world" (John 6:50-52).

If I am to appreciate the magnificence of this love of Jesus, I must contemplate my crucifix. Jesus' gesture upon the cross is a continual revelation of His divine bounty. As I study the last and loveliest gesture of those crucified hands of

Christ, I see that He flings them wide, to embrace the whole world, and I perceive that they are empty, those hands. He has given me all He has. He has loved me unto the end, unto perfection. He has given me Himself in the Blessed Eucharist.

Like the bread, the wine, I too am given. I am given to men for their salvation, for the life of the world. The truth is, that, in my own humble way, I am a sacrament or sign of the divine bounty of Christ. I am given to bring men to God. This is the ultimate meaning of my life, this life of mine which Christ has selected, taken, blessed, broken for His own purpose of saving others.

The priest is a sign of the efficaciousness of divine grace, "dispenser of the mysteries of God," as Paul says. The nun too is a sign, a symbol, a sacrament of death to self, a parable of a very special and very close union with Christ. When the bishop lays the veil upon the nun's head, the Roman Pontifical directs him to say: "Accept this sacred veil, by which you may be recognized as having despised the world and submitted yourself to Christ Jesus in very truth, in all humility, with the full force of your whole heart, as His spouse forever. (You belong) to Him who will defend you from all evil, and lead you to eternal life."

The nun is, accordingly, the sacrament of unworldliness, or better, of otherworldliness. She is a symbol of divine love. The nun is given to men as a sign to lead them to Jesus, her spouse. In her, His personality must dominate.

Is she not the symbol of that aspect of God's tender love already noted in the Old Testament by the prophet Isaias? "Can a woman forget the son she nursed at her breast? Is it possible for her not to take pity upon the fruit of her womb? Yet even if human mothers should forget, I shall not forget" (49:15-16).

The nun is given, then, as a sacrament of the tenderness of God. Her very human nature prepares her for that office. But it is the action of Christ's invisible grace that brings that symbolism to perfection. Father Gerald Kelly, S.J., has remarked that the woman who would make the best mother will make the best nun. Grace builds upon nature. It does not destroy it. Nor does it, normally, supply what is wanting in

nature. Christ, through the gentle influence of His grace, takes the woman's natural qualities and transforms them supernaturally so that they form the nun's most characteristic features. It is thus she becomes the symbol of the devoted, undying, delicately tender love of God for man.

Shall I not, then, like the submissive bread, the obedient wine of the Last Supper, offer my nun's life to Jesus? Shall not I, with loving trustfulness, confide my nun's existence to the all-powerful hands of Christ, my spouse? Shall I not, under the sweetly compelling impulse of His blessings, prove by my very being that the creative force of Christ's gestures of taking, blessing, breaking, giving, has been the dominant power in my life?

And if only I can manage to surrender my life into those divinely dynamic hands of Jesus, shall I not, in my way, be a sacrament for the life of the world? Shall I not prove before men the wisdom of His divine choice of me? Shall I not demonstrate the almighty power of His transforming word? Shall I not also find happiness for myself? For if I succeed in this, with His loving help, I shall have lived the truly Christian life, the goal of every religious.

And when finally I come to die, I shall, in my turn, deserve to have written above my head the only epitaph that any true Christian could desire. Christ took me. He blessed me. He broke, and gave me to men for the salvation of the world.

Saint Philip Neri

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THE INTROIT for the feast of St. Philip Neri strikes the tone proper to the saint's whole life: "The charity of God is poured forth in our hearts by His Spirit dwelling within us." If God most generously gave His grace to him, Philip Neri in return did all that he could by way of preparing a receptive soul into which the love of God could find ready entrance. He spent long periods of time with his whole attention fixed on God and His mysteries; he spent himself tirelessly in the cause of the Church, the Church which during his life was undergoing the attacks of the Protestant revolt.

The results of his eager desire for God were strikingly apparent. He lived in an almost constant state of experienced union with God which bore fruit in such exterior joy and gayness that no one who came within his influence, even for a fleeting encounter, was left untouched by the love of God acting through him. Young people flocked to him, believed in him, and he led them, without method, by the path of confidence and generosity to heaven.

In the rule of St. Benedict, it is promised that faithful fulfillment of the rule will enable his monks to "run in the way of God's commandments with expanded hearts and unspeakable sweetness of love." St. Philip Neri, though not a Benedictine, is a consoling witness that this can be done. To the degree that we reach out for God, He rushes to us — only our lack of desire hinders His action. True enough, restraint of our inclinations, hammering away at our faults are necessary preparation for the divine life, but we will never become transparent instruments of God's love unless we learn the important lesson of utter confidence in the love of God for us individually. If we are not filled up with unshakable conviction that in spite of everything we are dear to Him, we cannot run with enlarged hearts, we can do very little to draw the people whom we contact to desire Him and to hunger for Him, even though we might convince them that they must not sin.

In view of all this, May 26 is a perfect day to beg God, through the happy St. Philip Neri, that the communion verse may come to life in our souls after this day's Mass: "My heart and my flesh have rejoiced in the living God."

Mary and the Church

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THE LAST CENTURY has seen a remarkable development in the Church's understanding and belief concerning the Blessed Virgin. Around the definitions of the dogmas of the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption has grown an enormous literature asking further questions and seeking further insights into the role Mary plays in our lives and in the plan of redemption.

In the past many writers have been content to follow the mentality of the litany of the Blessed Virgin and pile title upon title, privilege upon privilege, until the possibilities were exhausted, and then tell us — this is Mary. Dissatisfied with this segmental approach, some contemporary thinkers have sought, and now think they have found, a key that gives new meaning to all that can be said of Mary, and a unified view of her dignity and role in the plan of redemption. The key is found in the relationship of Mary to the Church.

Once the comparison is made, many similarities can be found between Mary and the Church. A study of her life establishes links between the Blessed Virgin and the chosen people of Old Testament times as well as the chosen people of new Testament times, the Church instituted by Christ. Mary

is more than just an isolated historical figure. She experienced and fulfilled in her life all the trials and blessings experienced by the chosen people during the long years of the Old Testament when God was striving by various means to prepare His people for the coming of the Messias.

Her faithful virginity, for instance, is the embodiment of the faithful virginity Yahweh demanded of His daughter Israel. She asked from God only grace to understand and fulfill His will, thereby displaying the poverty and detachment from material things God wished in His people. All through the Old Testament God gradually reveals the universality of the Messianic Kingdom, with Israel as the instrument rather than the exclusive recipient of redemption. Mary is the perfect instrument in God's hands, fashioned especially by God to become the Mother of mankind bringing redemption in the person of Christ to all men. She sums up all that the chosen people were to become in their preparation for the coming of the Messias, and in this respect she is related to the people of God, the Jews, who first entered the Church Christ came to establish.

Her link with the New Testament Church is no less evident. Impetus was given to a study of the similarities between Mary and the Church by a Marian interpretation of the twelfth chapter of the Apocalypse of St. John. There is found the mysterious vision of the woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and a crown of twelve stars upon her head. The problems involved in this vision have been discussed for a long time. Currently the interpretation is often given that, in order to account for the varied phenomena included in the vision, the woman must designate both Mary and the Church. It is the Blessed Virgin giving birth to a Son, to Christ, who is caught up to God, and it is mother Church who with her offspring must battle with the dragon, the devil.

The vision is often aligned with the prophecy of the Virgin birth of Emmanuel in Isaias 7:14, and with the battle between the woman and the serpent in the protoevangel in Genesis 3:15. In both the protoevangel and the apocalyptic vision the dragon or serpent is fighting with the woman together with her offspring. The woman of the Apocalypse is

Mary, and she represents the Church giving birth to the entire mystical Body of Christ. It is Mary as a symbol of the perfect realization of the people of God, the ideal Church.

This inclusion of Mary as well as the Church in one symbol has led to a more detailed study of Mary's relationship with the Church. The results of this study are the similarities between Mary and the Church which are summed up in a reaffirmation of a principle that emerged from early Christianity, and was expressly stated: Mary is a type of the Church.

The vision of the woman of the Apocalypse points out one basic similarity. The only function attributed to the woman is that of giving birth. She is with child and in anguish of delivery. The woman is, then, a mother. The Church is often spoken of as a mother, giving birth to new children, nourishing them and encouraging in them the dispositions proper to a child of God.

However, in comparing Mary with the Church, a distinction must immediately be made. Mary can never be a type of the hierarchical Church, of the Church in its administrative function. This aspect of the Church is a continuation of the authority of Christ vested in the successors of the Apostles. It is the divine aspect of the Church. It is the power of Christ Himself acting through His hierarchy and the sacraments.

Mary, on the other hand, represents the human aspect of the Church. She stands for the entire community of believers, both the hierarchy and the laity, in so far as they receive the graces of Christ. She is the Church in its individual members saying "fiat" to God's plan for the redemption of mankind.

Like the Church, then, Mary is a mother. She is the Mother of God. This was both her basic role and her greatest privilege while on earth. It is the basis of her intimate relationship with Christ.

The Annunciation scene shows that as the Mother of God she also bears an intimate relationship with the Church. It was at the Annunciation that she became the Mother of God. She had been prepared for this great role by God from her birth, and now with her consent Christ enters human history, the Word becomes Flesh.

At the Annunciation, however, the Blessed Virgin did not give her consent only in her own name but in the name of all mankind. Her consent makes her the spiritual Mother of the Church as well as the physical Mother of Christ, and she becomes associated with her divine Son in the suffering and death which will accomplish our salvation. At the Annunciation she becomes the Mother of Christ and the Mother of the Mystical Body of Christ, and her consent associates her with the entire history of the Church beginning at Calvary and continuing until the Second Coming.

The Blessed Virgin's spiritual maternity, moreover, must not be considered a mere figure of speech. There is more than a moral relationship between the Church and Mary. In order to understand this the doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ must be recalled. The members of the Church are true members of Christ; there is a real union between the Church and Christ, because the Church lives by the life of Christ. Mary is the mother of the Christ in whom is life in all fullness. Each member of the Church lives in the life of Christ, of this Man-God Mary brought forth. The Church is Christ, and so Mary is the Mother of the Church.

The Blessed Virgin was prepared for her role as the Mother of God by a number of special privileges. At first glance, there seems to be a great deal of difficulty in relating them to the Church, for they seem to be unique privileges exclusively Mary's and without parallel in the history of the Church. How can the Church be considered a mother and virginal at the same time, as was Mary? This, of course, does not mean that every member of the Church is to be a physical virgin, but that the Church as a whole must become a spiritual virgin.

In the Old Testament the daughter Israel was to be a virgin by remaining faithful to the promises of Yahweh and not pursuing false gods. Defection from Yahweh was called adultery. The Church also remains a virgin by remaining steadfast in the faith, not polluting it with false beliefs, or adulterating it by rejecting any part. The Virgin Mary accepted all that God asked of her, and believed in Him without reservation. So also the virgin Church retains its purity by a wholehearted

welcoming of God's truth and God's will. Mary represents in her perpetual virginity the wholehearted and all-embracive faith which must be characteristic of the Church.

Her Immaculate Conception was likewise a privilege exclusive to Mary and given in view of her role as the Mother of God. In what sense can the Church be called immaculate? A look at baptism will give an answer to the problem. In baptism a person is cleansed of original sin and incorporated into the life of Christ, into the Mystical Body of Christ. At the moment he becomes a member of the Church he is sinless, and he has received the life of Christ. Original sin is not taken away after a person becomes a member of the Church, but at the moment he becomes a member.

The Church, then, is a community of the redeemed, the Mystical Body which shares from the beginning of its existence, the life of Christ. The Church is immaculate at the moment of conception of its individual members, as was the Blessed Virgin at her own conception. The difference between Mary and the Church is that Mary was *full* of grace from the beginning of her existence, while the individual members of the Church attain their sanctity only gradually. Nevertheless, Mary also grew in grace throughout her life and in this respect remains a type of the Church.

It was an Immaculate Virgin, then, who consented at the Annunciation to be the Mother of God and of the Church. Already containing in herself the dignity which Christ desired in His mother, she consented to become His mother and to follow through her vocation to its culmination at Calvary. And she remains a type of the Church in her association with Christ during His entire life.

St. John's Gospel gives two instances which emphasize Mary's intimate relationship with Christ during His life. In the wedding scene at Cana Mary is involved in the first miracle which Christ performed, the miracle which inaugurated His public life. On Calvary Mary again appears, and the beloved disciple, St. John, is given to her. According to a well-known interpretation, St. John represents all of mankind in this scene. In giving St. John to Mary, then, Christ is announcing in more explicit terms her universal motherhood.

Mary's appearance in St. John's Gospel at the beginning and the end of our Lord's public life indicates that the Blessed Virgin is to be associated with Christ during his entire life on earth, and especially during His suffering and death.

Mary, then, became the Mother of God and of the Church at the Incarnation, and in this role lived out her life of participation in the plan of redemption. Mary is a type of the Church in its human aspect, and on Calvary the Church is represented in its human element by Mary. Christ represents the divine element in our redemption. It is true that our Lord also fully represents the human element, for He assumed a human nature and in His human body suffered and died. His sacrifice was all that was necessary for our redemption, strictly speaking, and yet He willed to associate His mother with Himself.

Although her cooperation was not absolutely necessary, Mary does nevertheless stand at the foot of the cross as the representative of mankind, suffering with her Savior and contributing by her subordinate position to its fulness, without actually causing our redemption in the way that Christ caused it.

Here Mary is fulfilling her role as co-redemptress, and here also she is a type of the Church. Actually it is here that Mary as a type of the Church takes on her greatest significance. Immaculately conceived, and, by the foreseen merits of Christ, already pre-redeemed, she represents those who have already been redeemed by the waters of baptism.

Pope Pius XII indicates the manner in which the Church is a co-redemptress with Christ. He points out that the members of the Mystical Body must cooperate with Christ in order to bring salvation to all of mankind. Christ has need of His members, and it is their duty to offer their sufferings and penances with Christ in order to make Christ's redemptive act the act of the whole Christ, Head and members. We are to fill up the sufferings of Christ in His body, so that there may be one Church and one complete Christ on the last day.

Mary shows us how to join our sufferings with those of Christ, how to be co-redeemers with Christ. She offered herself totally to the plan God designed for redemption; she fulfilled her role according to the fulness of grace. She became the Queen of martyrs by her union with Christ on

Calvary. And so she represents the Church in its ideal state, saving her children by associating herself completely with the sufferings of Christ. The Mass, the re-enactment of Calvary, offers us the opportunity to fulfill the ideal Mary presents to us. Just as Mary suffered with Christ, so the militant Church is in its present state a suffering Church, continually contributing to the redemption of mankind.

This, incidentally, is the reason Protestants find it so difficult to accept the Blessed Virgin, and consequently, the Church. They think of redemption as an act which is totally from the side of God. They cannot accept the possibility of human cooperation in redemption, and so they reject Mary in her human role in the plan of redemption. Redemption, however, is an affair which involves both God and man. Christ's mystical Body must suffer and continue to suffer, and through its own instrumentality help bring itself to completion and salvation.

The Church on earth looks forward in the midst of its suffering to its future glory in heaven. Christ has shown the path to heaven by His Resurrection and Ascension, and Mary has followed Him in the privilege of her Assumption. Just as she represents the Church in its suffering state, so she represents the Church in its state of glory. Once the members have been sanctified through the instrumentality of their own suffering joined to that of Christ, the community of the Church will be gathered up into union with God in heaven at the general resurrection. The Church will rise from the dead on the last day. The whole Christ, Christ in all His members, will participate in the glorification of God in their bodies as well as in their souls.

Mary has already received this glory by anticipation in her Assumption. Her entire human nature is in heaven glorifying God. And so she has reached the goal of the Church. Her assumption displays the hope of every Christian, the end towards which we all strive. Like her, the Church is to be assumed into heaven. She is the Church in its ideal glorified form. The only difference between Mary and the Church is that she was given her privilege before the general resurrection. The Church will be glorified only after the general resurrection.

Throughout her life, then, from the Immaculate Conception to the Assumption, Mary can be understood as a type of the Church. At the center of her life is the Annunciation scene, which presents her as the Mother of God. Once she became the Mother of God she took up her position between Christ and the Church. And so now in heaven she continues to hold the same position. Her role in heaven is the prolongation of her function of representing the Church throughout her life. The ideals she presents to the Church in her life gives the road to be followed by the Church, and now as mediatrix of grace she is the representative of the Church interceding for the graces needed to follow that road. Like the Church, she now nourishes the proper dispositions in her spiritual children. It is her assimilation to Christ and the Church while on earth which gives her present intercession its special efficacy. In heaven she is still the Church's mother, caring for her children.

The picture of Mary standing before the throne of God interceding for the Church indicates a difference between Mary and the Church which holds true throughout all points of comparison. In point of time Mary preceded the Church. She was born before the Church. She participated in the foundation of the Church on Calvary. So also when analogies are made between her and the Church she always takes the precedence.

This can easily be seen in her Assumption, for she has received her crown of glory before the rest of the Church. Also, as the Mother of God she has attained a level of sanctity unattainable by the rest of the Church. Her superiority in this regard, however, is only a matter of degree, and so she remains the human embodiment of the ideal of mankind, and the living proof that our redemption is possible. For the Church is already in heaven in its complete glorified state in the person of Mary. The degree of sanctity the Church does finally attain will be partly due to her continual assistance and maternal concern.

This, then, in general, is one of the important directions that thought about Mary is taking today. Some writers say that the striking similarities between Mary and the Church point to a conscious design on the part of God. God wished to insert Mary prominently into the life and suffering of Christ.

She is, then, not just an interesting sidelight in the spiritual life, but an important element woven into the texture of God's plan of redemption. Her life takes on a greater significance if she is considered not in herself but in her relationship to Christ and the Church.

The most important fact in her life remains of course, her vocation as the Mother of God. The rest of her life is understandable only if this is the basis of our meditation. She became the Mother of the Church because she is God's Mother. She received her privileges in preparation for her vocation as the Mother of God. As the Mother of God and the Church she suffered with Christ on Calvary.

If we think of the Blessed Virgin in her role as a type of the Church we are likely to have a more authentic devotion to her. Her privileges will be not only an impulse to veneration, but a challenge to become assimilated to the reality they present. Her sufferings will be the human ideal we are capable of imitating, and her Assumption will be a further proof that our home and our happiness are to be found beyond the limitations of this world. She manifests in her life the sanctity and growth in the full union with God that each of us in turn must experience and attain. To the Church she indicates by her life the road to be followed and by her privileges the perfections to be attained. She is a unique symbol of the Church's hope and the present realization of its final perfection. She is the type of the Church.

Convent Queries

Winfrid Herbst, S.D.S.
Jordan, Wisconsin

Do you think that defections among the young Sisters are due to the lack of respect shown in the community to the aged Sisters?

Really, now, that never occurred to me. I do not think so. There will always be a bit of friction between the young and the old. It has ever been so and always so will be.

"That fresh young thing!" the old Sister may say in exasperation at the behavior of the younger generation. "What old-fashioned notions those ancient Sisters have!" the young Sister may say in vexation at the persistent clinging to old traditions of the old pioneers. It is a good thing that there is a proper counterbalance: the young surging forward, the old exercising prudent restraint. It all helps when trying to maintain the delicate balance between adaptation to modern needs without mitigation of the original spirit of the institute.

No; I do not think so. Our young Sisters are too sensible for that. They know that everywhere in the world forbearance is necessary. They know that there is no earthly perfection without some admixture of imperfection. But this does not mean that there are not many inconsiderate and thoughtless words and looks and actions directed at aged religious. How deplorable the attitude betrayed in remarks like the following: "She's old enough to die." "She has served her purpose." "She's just vegetating." It is sad that so many religious cannot be more friendly and chatty with the old at recreation, do so little to make them feel that they belong, forget to invite them to little entertainments and trips. Why aren't they better listeners when the old like to talk of days gone by? Why do they think that all aged religious are deaf and always shout at them? Why are they so unwilling to raise their voices when they are hard of hearing? Why are they not more attentive to their wants at table and less attentive to their manners? Why do they not visit them oftener when they are confined to their rooms? Why? Why? Why? Perhaps it is because they have forgotten that God loves the old and feeble for very much the same reason that He has a special love for children. Perhaps they have forgotten the Golden Rule that they should do unto others as they would have others do unto them. Perhaps they have even forgotten the Savior's words: "What you have done to these, you have done to Me."

No; I don't think so. The young Sisters cannot help but observe that, on the whole, the aged Sisters are treated so well, are so lovingly cared for, have it so nice as they are surrounded by tender loving care. As for the old Sisters themselves, they should grow old gracefully; act their age; hand the principal tasks to younger hands; let the younger

Sisters have some initiative of their own; be careful not to impose inflexibly their methods upon the younger generation; adapt themselves to modern conditions in a sensible way; keep an open mind; and have a saving sense of humor in their dealings with others.

Old Sisters should gradually restrict their external activity, while doing a certain minimum of real work, physical or mental, every day at a fixed time. They should read a little every day, if they can, and keep an open mind. They should keep up the standards of the religious life and faithfully perform the spiritual exercises prescribed, without trying to do that for which they are no longer fitted, for instance, the recitation of the Office in choir.

Though they should not become obsessed with the care of their health, the aged Sisters should attend carefully to personal hygiene, watch their eating habits, and have an eye to neatness all around.

Old Sisters have to watch from the sidelines, so to speak, as the younger Sisters take over. Then they may even be placed on the shelf, to use another figure of speech. Let them take it all with resignation and cheerfulness, without speaking too much of themselves or their ills, without complaining, without demanding that their every whim be satisfied, without lack of gratitude for favors done. With a smile let them remember that for a while their advice and counsel will be asked for, but not followed, and finally will not even be asked for.

I often think of Our Lady when I think of old Sisters. After the Ascension of the divine Savior into heaven she, too, watched the apostolic activities of the disciples, supporting the infant Church with her prayers — and waiting for Jesus to come and get her. She knew it wouldn't be long now.

When Father Sertillanges, O.P., was eighty-five he wrote: "For the Christian, old age is not a final farewell to whatever appeals and desperately clings to our lust for life. Quite the contrary, it is the full growth and final flowering of hope. It is the threshold of what had merely been suggested by the springtime of life. It is the first sight of land after an apparently interminable voyage. It is the veil which has

been torn from an illusion and exposes to view the supreme realities. Old age is the approach to God. Descent into the grave, since it represents but a partial truth, is an illusion. Rather do we ascend."

Convent Book Shelf

GUIDANCE FOR RELIGIOUS. By Rev. Gerald Kelly, S.J. The Newman Press, Westminster, Maryland. 1956. xi-321 pages. Cloth, $4.50.

The author is no stranger to Sisters, as he is well known as a moral theologian who has devoted his best efforts to research in and solution of problems in the religious life. The chapters of his book formerly appeared as articles in Review for Religious.

Collected between two book covers they make invaluable reading. The purpose of the work is to give guidance in the spiritual direction of religious, which includes "instruction and encouragement" in God's designs, and also some "friendly criticism." The first three sections are for religious, though not exclusively; the fourth part intends to reach the laity through religious. It seems to the reviewer that any religious, young or old, could pick up and read the whole volume with great profit, thus achieving some valuable self-direction. The author says that "God can accomplish wonders in the soul directly, but most often He uses the human means of direction." And so priests, superiors, confessors and others will want to possess the basic information which the writer so clearly dispenses to all.

There is also a word in favor of direction by superiors, which too many religious neglect as an ordinary means. In the words of Father Kelly: "It seems to me that the notion of spiritual direction by the superior needs special emphasis because one reaction to the Church's ruling against obligatory manifestation of conscience has been a swing to the opposite extreme, namely, that superiors are too rarely consulted even in matters in which they are both qualified and willing to give advice. Either extreme is an evil" (p. ix). While in hearty agreement with this statement and the author's further explanation of it, one feels the necessity of warning against the abuse of manifestation of conscience by superiors in some communities, where one is astounded at the degree of manifestation, even revealing certain sins to superiors.

It remains to detail the excellent contents with its chapters of packed, practical wisdom for religious. The titles are: Emotional Maturity; Family Spirit; The Particular Friendship; The Duty of Loving the

Neighbor, Especially Enemies; Detraction; Good Confessions and Better Confessions; Contrition; The Prudent Use of Confession Privileges; Confession before Communion; Qualities of a Good Moral Guide; Vocational Counseling; Moral Beauty in Our Duties Towards God; How Often Must We Pray; Subjective Sin; The Law of Integral Confession; Scruples Versus the Human Way; How to Think and Act about the Race Problem.

Paschal Botz, O.S.B.
Collegeville, Minnesota

IN REMEMBRANCE OF ME. By Monsignor A. G. Mortimort. Translated by Dom Aldhelm Dean. The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota, 1958. Pp. 217. Cloth.

This book is a brief but penetrating summary of the elements of Christian worship. There are no controversies; just quiet statement. Everything is covered. Nevertheless depth, exuberance, light characterize Mortimort's motif-thoughts and attitudes.

Unusual (for so short a book) are the chapters on the Christian assembly, words and gestures, "Sunday, the Day of the Lord," "The Death of the Christian"; insights of great beauty about the Christian life as Light, hidden but absolute, widening out into the blaze of eternity. Summaries really summarize; readings — vivid, brief, often pictorial — admirably point up each chapter's chief ideas. The book is straightforward enough for beginners; sufficiently profound to reawaken in the more advanced appreciations that wilt under fire of the "terrible everyday."

There are minor blemishes. On p. 33 Mortimort says: "confirmation . . . makes us prophets of the New Law"; but his lucid explanation of "prophet" comes a hundred pages later; to call the Passio simply a "prayer of good wishes" does not seem to indicate the value these "good wishes" can have. But this is minor. The book is satisfying, even exquisite: the dying Christian "understands that he is about to experience his last Easter, more beautiful than all that have gone before." In a way, this is the book's burden: to experience Easter.

Sister Mary Lucia, O.P.
Covington, Louisiana

APOSTLE OF BRAZIL. The Biography of Padre José de Anchieta, S.J. (1534-1597). By Helen G. Dominian. Exposition Press, New York, N.Y., 1958. Pp. xi-346, cloth $5.00.

The Venerable José de Anchieta is very likely an unknown name to many of us, who are not acquainted with the efforts of the early Jesuit missionaries in the Portuguese colonization of South America. Born in 1534, José was a relative of St. Ignatius Loyola; and he who would one day be called "the apostle of Brazil" came as an infirm brother of the Society to the eastern coast of South America in 1553. He was ordained twelve years later.

The author pictures well José de Anchieta, whose cause is now up for beatification. Suffering from an early injury that had twisted his spine into the shape of an S, the missionary had his own remedy. "Work is medicine," he wrote, and during his forty-four years in South America, he was teacher, doctor, linguist, poet, and chronicler. But foremost, he was an apostle ad majorem gloriam Dei who underwent continual dangers and torments for and among his Brazilian Indians. The life of this missionary is an inspiration.

This book is recommended for both its historical and biographical worth. O.S.

THE GOSPEL STORY. By Monsignor Ronald Knox and Father Cox, C.M. Sheed & Ward, New York, 1958. Pp. 437. Cloth, $4.50.

The Gospel Story by Knox-Cox can well be regarded as an answer to Sisters' prayers. Which Sister, when riding the chariot of morning Scripture meditation, has not deplored the absence of another apostle Philip running along the road of the chapel-aisle to answer her nagging questions? Father Cox is that Philip. In The Gospel Story he has done two things very well.

Father Cox has taken the Gospel narrative and told the chronological life of Christ by combining the exact texts of the evangelists into a unified whole. He leaves the story of Christ unencumbered by reference citations. Thus a delightfully readable life of Christ (with "you" substituted for Msgr. Knox's "thou") is found on the right-hand pages of this book.

The left-hand italicized pages reveal Father Cox in the role of Philip. Paragraph by paragraph he emphasizes the unified plan of Christ: to redeem man and to found a Church to continue in time the fruits of the Redemption. Every Gospel scene is given its proper geographical, historic and cultural setting in the light of Jewish custom and tradition — all this in a way nowise distracting from Christ but always enhancing Him.

One perceives the real unction of the Holy Spirit on this Philip most unmistakably in Father Cox's ability to explain accurately and yet constantly to centralize the Gospel message with an unusual economy of words. True, this book is not intended to supplant a Scripture commentary. But for the ordinary needs of a Sister it obviates the labor of consulting an extra book. Yet it gives her what she ardently desires —the capability of making the story of Christ alive, real, and unified for herself and her pupils.

While the omission of chapter and verse references is likely a distinct advantage for the ordinary lay person for whom the book was primarily intended, many Sisters will find this an annoying disadvantage. Father Cox has, however, added a convenient chronological harmony at the end with the corresponding pages of The Gospel Story indicated.

Lovers of the individuality of the four evangelists will also regret that loss. Still, this reviewer is convinced that zealous reading of Knox-Cox will not close the New Testament to anyone but open it much wider.

An added beauty of The Gospel Story lies in the fact that the left-hand commentary pages are not forbidding scholarly mazes of notes and footnotes. On the contrary, they are in themselves an inviting book. One finds the two opposite pages in constant rivalry for the reader's attention and interest.

The Gospel Story by Knox-Cox well deserves to be the answer to "What would you like for your birthday, Sister?"

Sister Berchmans Zwilling, O.S.B.
St. Cloud, Minnesota

THE SISTERS ARE ASKING. By Rev. Winfrid Herbst, S.D.S. The Newman Press, Westminster, Md. 1956, Pp. 190. Cloth, $3.00.

The author of this book followed the practice of having a question-box conference during his retreats to Sisters. It is from that source that the questions in the present book are drawn. They cover a wide variety of subjects, but for convenience are grouped under such headings as religious discipline, superiors, poverty, obedience, etc. Some deal with important points of doctrine or discipline; others pertain to the details of daily living. All are answered with clarity and precision. There can be little doubt that Fr. Herbst's practical answers will be of help to many Sisters. S.H.

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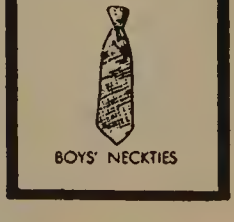

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